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Commissioners consider radio issues

During today's regularly-scheduled meeting of the Commissioners' Court, Constable Terry Nay updated the Court on issues surrounding Federal Communications Commission requirements to reduce all radio communications to narrow band in January of 2013. At issue, whether to contract with TROTT Communications Group for independent engineering services or allow time for Aerowave to complete some preliminary testing first.

"I might suggest, if we can buy a week and schedule a special session to make this decision, it makes more sense instead of spending the \$49,000 on a theory, spend it on something that has been tested in the field," Nay said. "Will it work? I don't know."

"We've sat in a lot of long meetings," said Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, who has been among those working on radio interoperability for some time. "What I know is that I still know very little."

The difficulty of the decision is compounded by the need for grant funding and a tight deadline under which to apply for it.

"By the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month, I've got to have a final cost," said Emergency Management Coordinator John Patterson, adding that a broad estimate would be a cost of about \$500,000 to meet the narrow banding requirements.

County Judge Carol Bush noted that a special meeting of the Court has already been scheduled for November 15 for the purpose of canvassing the vote from the November 2 General Election and suggested adding the item to that agenda, taking no action on it today.

Nay said some testing was already underway through Aerowave and so far looked favorable.

"This is a very technical issue and it will affect us for a great many years," he concluded.

Nay also updated the Court on a potential interlocal agreement with the Texas Department of Transportation to prohibit the registration of motor vehicles owned by individuals that owe the County money for a fine, fee, or tax that is past due.

"This is just informative today, to let you know which direction we are looking at heading," Nay said, adding that he had discussed the program with County Tax Assessor/Collector John

Bridges. “What it does is blocks their auto registration. It is something that is outwardly visible; you know you can get pulled over for it.”

Commissioners asked to hear reports on the effectiveness of the program in neighboring counties as a method to encourage payment of overdue fines, fees and taxes.

The Court also took some early steps toward the construction of juvenile detention and Sheriff’s Office facilities on the property known as the County Farm, awarding the bid for construction to Corbet Construction, the bid for excavation and paving to J & K Excavation, and the bid for professional engineering services for geotech and material testing to Terracon Consultants.

“This facility will take us long into the future,” said County Engineer Joe White. “If we need a small building, we will not have to worry about it for many years. It’s like building a subdivision without the houses – it’s a planned community.”

“It’s a pretty area, and the way it is designed architecturally, it will be a nice improvement,” said Bush.

Corbet Construction recently finished work on the county’s new Adult Probation Offices as well as the refurbished train depot project for the City of Waxahachie.

The Court also heard a presentation from Casey Ballard with United Way of West Ellis County.

“You already do a United Way campaign, and we receive a check monthly, but we would like to talk about growing the campaign a little bit,” Ballard said. “It can be simple: just an opportunity to talk to the employees so they can understand how important this is. If an employee gives only six dollars a month, they can feed one person a day through Meals on Wheels.”

Ballard said the members of the United Way board met with approximately 30 non-profit organizations last week, hearing pleas for funding amounting to over \$500,000 for the upcoming year.

“We would love to be able to give that out, but we are not going to be able to do so until we involve everyone,” she said, adding that the group funds non-profits as large as Meals on Wheels or as small as The Light of Gabriel Foundation.

Ballard confirmed that dollars raised in Ellis County are spent in Ellis County, at the full discretion of the Ellis County boards of directors, either the West Ellis County or Greater Ennis groups.

“We want to be sure that we are talking about the entire county as we talking about United Way,” she said. “As we are giving Ellis County employees the opportunity to participate in a campaign, they can choose United Way of West Ellis County or Greater Ennis United Way.”

In other business, Commissioners:

- Granted a variance allowing a flush valve instead of a fire hydrant for a replat of property at Reagor Gateway in pct. 2;
- Denied a request to locate a salvage yard at 2585 South Highway 77 due to health and safety concerns, with Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3, casting a dissenting vote;
- Approved a preliminary plat for Hidden Hill Subdivision in pct. 3;
- Declared a 1999 Chevrolet and a 2002 Dodge Stratus as surplus;
- Appointed Don Weldon to replace Darryl McGee as a commissioner for Emergency Service District #7 effective immediately;
- Approved an interlocal contract with the City of Maypearl;
- Authorized the County Judge to enter into an interlocal agreement between Ellis, Johnson, Hill and Somervell Counties and the Prairielands Groundwater Conservation

District wherein the counties agree to loan monies to the district for the maintenance and operation of the district on a short-term basis, pursuant to Minute Order 393.09;

- Appointed County Court at Law #2 Judge Gene Calvert to the Ellis County Bail Bond Board to the slot statutorily designated for a judge of a county court or county court at law for the period of January through December, 2011;
- Viewed a short Powerpoint presentation on the 2010 Employee Health Fair.